

SF train Iraqi special operators

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The Iraqi special operations force, which is the Iraqi Armed Forces' commando strike force trained by U.S. Army Special Forces units, continues to operate throughout Iraq with multinational force assistance.

The strike force unit was formed after Prime Minister Ayad Allawi asked multinational force personnel to build the Iraqi Armed Forces a high-end strike force in its ongoing security mission against anti-Iraqi forces operating in the country.

Consisting of two trained battalions, including the 36th Commando Battalion — an infantry-type strike force — and the Iraqi Counterterrorism Battalion, the force continues to earn distinction in many operations throughout the country, including places like Fallujah, Najaf and Samarra, fighting anti-Iraqi forces while continuing the stand-up effort of the unit.

The U.S. Special Forces core task of training other nations' military forces to conduct operations, also known as foreign internal defense, allows the Iraqi battalions to provide security for their own homeland.

Along with conducting the FID mission in Iraq, U.S. SF continue to successfully train other indigenous militaries such as the Afghan National Army. The ANA and coalition forces in Afghanistan stopped insurgents from disrupting the successful October 2004 election of the Afghan president where more than eight million Afghans voted in a free election for the first time in their lives.

Iraqi SOF recruit the best from the Iraqi National Guard and Iraqi army units currently operating in Iraq.

"A lot these guys do come from former Iraqi special ops," a Special Forces multinational adviser said. Outstanding recruits are selected for special operations forces in a vetting process, including exhaustive background checks; skill and unit evaluations; along with literacy, psychological and physical tests, are run through various team-building and physical events meant to filter through the recruiting pool. The selection process runs roughly 10 to 14 days.

And while the counterterrorist battalion was completely built upon individual applicants from the ground up, the 36th Commandos' genesis actually began with the identification of a particular Iraqi National Guard battalion which fought with distinction in Fallujah in recent months.

"They are very, very effective," the Special Operations Forces adviser said. "They exercise extreme discipline and are totally mission focused."

“And they have taken minimal losses,” he said. The new Iraqi SOF unit suffered only a single fatality in action up to November.

“They’re fully capable,” he said.

And training efforts continue to improve their efficiency as the units work through Special Forces-type training, normally consisting of intense physical training, land navigation, small unit tactics, live-fire exercises, unconventional warfare operations, direct action operations, airmobile operations, counterterrorism and survival, evasion, resistance, and escape training.

Special operations Soldiers are an army’s unconventional warfare experts, possessing a broad range of operational skills.

Soldiers in the unit routinely negotiate “live-fire,” building-clearing exercises involving helicopter rooftop insertions and quick ground assault strikes on buildings and other typical operational scenarios.

The SOF adviser said that what the Iraqis are looking for are individuals with a particular mental toughness and aptitude with team-player attributes – a recruiting mission with which the Iraqi Ministry of Defense still leans heavily on multinational advisers’ expertise.

“The intent, though, is for them to be fully operational without any (multinational) assistance,” he said. “But right now, there is no final stand-up date.”

“You see all these guys?” an Iraqi SOF soldier from the unit asked about the new recruits. “They want to do great things.”



An Iraqi special operations forces soldier clears a house while moving south toward Fallujah during Operation Al Fajr.